

THE *H. G. S.*
L A W
O F *1748. Oct. 3.*
T R U T H:
OR, THE
Obligations of REASON
Essential to all RELIGION,

To which are Prefixed,
Some Remarks supplemental to a late Tract;
entitled, *DIVINE RECTITUDE.*

*Lex nihil est aliud nisi recta —— Ratio;
imperans honesta, prohibensque contraria.*

Cic.

L O N D O N:
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THE
P R E F A C E.

THE Reader is desired to excuse these Remarks thrown in his Way. As they are Supplemental to another Tract, I might have found another Place for them. But since they appeared no improper Introduction to the following Essay; I chose to prefix them here.

THAT the eternal Truth and Reason of Things universally directs and obliges all Moral Agents, and even the Deity himself; seemed to me some time ago a Point scarce controvertible. Without stopping therefore at this, I endeavoured to shew in a for-

mer Paper, that a perpetual Conformity to Truth is the clearest Idea we can have of God's Moral Perfection; which being exhibited to the Mind in the mixed Light of various Attributes, was, I thought, more obscurely and imperfectly conceived. But since the very Foundation of that Doctrine is rejected by Some, and suspected by Others; I judge it necessary to give it a more particular Examination, before I proceed to the Remainder of my Design.

THEY who ascribe the Rectitude of the Divine Actions to the Perfection of God's Will; must either mean his Will as directed, or as undirected. If as undirected; what do they mean by the Perfection of such a Will? A perfect Will conformable to no Rule, and directed by Nothing; appears to me very absurd, or altogether unintelligible. According to my Apprehensions, the Perfection of Will essentially consists in a strict and uninterrupted Conformity to some proper Rule: forasmuch as to act without such a Rule; is to act arbitrarily, capriciously, and at Random. If any Agent can shew Cause, why he acted after one manner rather than another; he has followed some Rule: if he can shew no Cause; whatever be the Effect or Tendency of his Actions, they are utterly irreconcileable with the lowest Degree of Wisdom; how much more with the

the highest?—In short; to suppose the Will of the Supreme Agent under no Direction, and uninfluenced by the Dictates of his own unerring Understanding; is to suppose Darkness where there is nothing but Light, and the most perfect Counsel set aside for the Sake of Chance and Confusion.

ON the other hand, if by the Will of God be meant his Will as directed; then I beg Leave to ask, what can be supposed to direct it but Reason and Truth? Or in other Words, what so proper and likely to direct the Divine Will, as the Divine Understanding, the Source of all Reason, and the Fountain of all Truth? The Scripture expressly mentions the Counsel of God's Will. Are we to understand by this Counsel, Truth, or Affection; Rectitude, or Benevolence? Whether of these Principles tends to produce in our Minds, juster, worthier, and more honourable Conceptions of the Deity; that by all means ought to have the Preference. Let us consider and compare them together.

BENEVOLENCE is either Rational, as founded on Reason, and produced by it; or a Natural Affection, a physical Disposition, distinct from Reason, and independent on it. Rational Benevolence coincides with the

the Principle for which I contend, or results from it, The Natural Disposition, or the Affection of Benevolence, cannot, I think, be properly considered as any Branch of Moral Perfection: and if it could, would nevertheless be much inferior to the Principle of Rectitude. It cannot be looked upon as a moral Perfection, or indeed a rational Principle; unless it be either produced, or directed by Reason, or both; which are all contrary to the Supposition. It may have, in many Cases, the Approbation and Concurrence of Reason; and they may jointly promote the same Ends: Yet still, I presume, this is not sufficient to bring it under the Denomination of a Moral Principle.—But whatever it may be reputed, or called; if the Merits of it be examined; it will be found, if I mistake not, so far from excelling or equalling the Principle of Rectitude, that it will by no means bear a Comparison. We shall soon be convinced of this; if we consider the two Principles as we find them exercised and exerted among Men.

HUMAN BENEVOLENCE, considered as a natural Affection, is commonly, and indeed very properly, called Good-nature. For Goodness of Nature it really is; as consisting of a high degree of that Social Instinct, which God has been pleased to plant variously in the Minds of Men.

Men. And however desirable, however amiable this Principle may appear ; yet in strictness, and morally speaking, it is the Creator's Goodness, and not the Creature's. He who possesses it, is only the Possessor of it. The natural Influence and Operation of it is, in him, no Merit at all ; unless it may be accounted Merit that he does not resist the Bent of his Nature. As far as he actually complies with it ; as far as he cherishes and strengthens it by Reason and Reflection ; so far he is praise-worthy : but otherwise neither the Impulses of the Affection, nor the Effects produced by it, can justly be placed to his Account. Though therefore this natural Benevolence be a great Help to Virtue ; yet of itself it is not Virtue, as I have elsewhere observed. Men may have it, and yet be vicious ; or they may want it, and yet be virtuous. A high Degree of it may make Men almost passive in Acts of Kindness ; as it gives their Minds so strong a Bias towards such Acts, that the very Forbearance of them is a kind of Violence and Self-denial. On which Account, as may be observed by the Way, much greater Improvements in Virtue and Goodness are doubtless expected from such Persons.

ON the other hand, if we consider the Principle of Rectitude, even human Rectitude ; we shall not find it thus empty and worthless

worthless in a Moral Account. Freely to choose what is most worthy to be chosen; and to determine, and do, what is right and fit in itself, for that very Reason because it is so; must either be an Action morally good and meritorious, or Man is not capable of either doing or conceiving such an Action. For this is chusing an Object simply good in it self, and paying that Homage to Truth and Righteousness which is, naturally and necessarily due. It is acting most freely, because without any antecedent Propension. And it is acting from a Principle as disinterested as any Benevolence can possibly be. Where these Characters concur, they must either produce Moral Worth; or there neither is, nor can be, any such Thing in the World.—To ask why there is more Desert in doing right, than in doing wrong; is the same Thing as to ask, why Truth is better than Error; Light than Darknes; Pleasure than Pain: the Absurdity of all which Questions is alike self-evident. The Querist need only be put in Mind of the necessary Natures of Things, which he must find essentially different. And the Actions of Moral Agents are as different in their own Nature, as any Things whatever. If Happiness be in itself preferable to Misery; an Action productive of Happiness must be, in it self, better than an Action productive of Misery:

the Effect, in one Case, having a real absolute Value; in the other, being worse than nothing. And the like Difference is observable between right and wrong Actions; even supposing them to have no Connexion with any Happiness or Natural Good. Conformity to Truth is, in itself, as different from Iniquity, as Pleasure is from Pain. Gratitude to a Benefactor would be better, infinitely better, than Ingratitude; though the Person obliged were utterly incapable of making the least Requital, or the Benefactor of receiving any. Which is actually the Case between Man and his Maker. This Difference of Actions is not arbitrary, or factious; but necessary, and unchangeable, as the Rule by which they are directed. The Rule of Truth being, in its own Nature, the best Rule that is possible to be followed, or conceived; acting conformably to it must needs be the most worthy Action; supposing, as above, that the Agent's Choice of it is entirely free and disinterested. If it be, in some measure, owing to a physical Predetermination of his Mind; or to Views of Interest; the Action is in Proportion less pure and perfect.—To say that the Rule of Truth is no otherwise to be regarded, or valued, than as it conduces to Pleasure or Profit; is, in Effect, denying the very Existence of Moral Good, and desecrating the most sacred

Thing in the World. But this Point will come again under Consideration in the following Tract.

IT may perhaps be here urged, that the Conformity of Men's Actions to such a Rule, can however be no Desert in Them. At least, that the same Abatements and Diminutions are to be allowed here, which were insisted on before in respect of Natural Benevolence. If Men deserve little or nothing by such Actions as are owing to Natural Affection; must not the same be granted of those which are owing to supernatural Assistance? And is not this the Case of all our good Actions?—I answer, that the Principles of Nature and Grace are widely different. The latter, as we may reasonably suppose, acting only on the Mind intellectually, morally, and persuasively; while the former act physically, efficiently, and are, as it were, real Stimuli. Had Men the same Natural Impulsions to virtuous Actions in general, that they have to Acts of Kindness towards their nearest Relations; then indeed their moral Character, and the Worth of their virtuous Deeds would sink in Proportion. But supernatural Influences are of a quite different kind. They neither infringe nor any way interfere with Human Liberty; which, as far as we can judge, is the same with them, or without them.

HOW-

HOWEVER, it is needless to enlarge on this Point; as being, in respect of the Deity, quite out of the Case. As He is incapable of any foreign Influences, the Goodness of his Actions can only be derived from his own inherent Perfections. And whether it be more conducive to his Honour, and more agreeable to Reason and Revelation, to ascribe them to moral Perfection, or natural; is a Question, if it be a Question, that well deserves to be considered. For a natural Perfection it must be, according to the Opinion which I am opposing: and of such a Kind too, as seems to tend to the Diminution of his Moral Character. I mean while it is represented as the Ground and Principle of his Actions: since the Influence of Truth and Reason must be supposed less in Proportion to the Efficacy of the affectionate Principle.

IF all the Favours of Heaven sprung meerly from Benevolence, in the Sense of Natural Affection; it would follow, according to the foregoing Account of this Principle, that they were less free, if not necessary: which Consequence is injurious to God's Honour, not only in the forementioned Respect; but likewise as it proportionably diminishes the Obligations of his Creatures. If that Immensity of Good which fills the Universe,

was entirely the Effect of a natural Necessity ; They would be under no Obligation at all. And to suppose it only resulting from a Determination not perfectly free ; must, by Consequence, lessen those Obligations in proportion to such a Diminution of Freedom.— If it be said, that there is no arguing from Human Benevolence, to Divine ; nor from the Operations of the One, to the Operations of the Other ; this is not untying, but cutting the Knot. For if we argue at all on the Subject ; we must argue from the Ideas of Human Perfections, to those of Divine : since we can have no Idea at all of the latter ; but what is derived from the former, with the Addition of Infinity. And whatever we find in ourselves ; no supposed Perfection ought we to ascribe to God, which interferes with a greater Perfection.—Should it be urged, that according to the other Opinion, God necessarily conforms his Actions to the Rule of Rectitude ; the Answer is, that the Necessity here meant is improperly so called. A Moral Necessity is so very different from Natural ; that it is consistent with the most perfect Freedom. If the Reasons and Relations of Things were destructive of Liberty, or inconsistent with it ; no such Power could possibly have existed. But however they may incline, or influence ; they can have no Degree of Efficiency. Certain therefore it is, that

that notwithstanding an Infinity of Moral Truths is ever before Him, and all of them have that Weight with Him which respectively belongs to them; God is nevertheless absolutely free in all his Actions and Determinations.

SUPPOSING the Benevolence of the Deity a meer physical Propension, undirected by any other Principle; supposing it either unlimited, or limited by sole Will and Pleasure; would it not follow from hence, that no Rational Account could be given of his Proceedings, even by Himself? And must not that be a strange Opinion, which represents the wisest and most rational of all Beings, as acting all along without Regard to Reason? I include not here Cases indifferent; which neither require a particular Reason, nor admit of any. It is surely no indifferent Matter whether the Creator be beneficent to his Creatures, or unbeneficent. If then it be said, that to an Agent of Power, there is always a Reason for Benevolence, when there is none against it; I say the same. Is then that Reason regarded by the Deity, or is it not? If it be; then He so far acts on the Principle of Rectitude: if it be not; how shall we avoid the forementioned Consequence?

AGAIN;

AGAIN ; if the sole, or predominant Principle of the Divine Actions be a Natural Affection, and that Affection a boundless Benevolence ; then to this, as Supreme, all other Principles must be, at least, Subordinate. All Regards, Views, and Intentions whatever, must continually give Place to it, and make Way for it. I ask then whether it can be supposed, that God would violate or counteract Truth in any Instance ; if from his so doing, Benefit would redound to his Creatures ? Were it possible for Him to double the Happiness of the Universe by a single Violation of Right and Truth ; I hope I shall be allowed to affirm, that He would certainly refuse it. I presume it is utterly inconsistent with the Divine Purity and Perfection, to submit to the least Degree of Moral Evil ; whatever Natural Good might be produced thereby.

IN this sense, if I mistake not, God is said to glorify Himself. And in this sense He indispensably requires that all his intelligent Creatures glorify him ; viz. by an inviolable Regard to Truth and Righteousness. And hence it appears, why the Good of Mankind, and all other Views whatever, are in Scripture constantly postponed to the Glory of God ; which, I think, primarily consists,
not

not in the Communication of Natural Good, as it is commonly represented; but in the Maintenance and Establishment of Moral Truth and Rectitude. To this sacred and supreme Rule all Things must bend, and all Agents submit. It is essentially glorious in itself; and as such, claims the strictest Regard, Reverence, and Homage, from all rational Beings. We are to observe it not only on our own Accounts; but as it is a Duty necessarily incumbent on us, and results from the holy and divine Nature of the Rule itself. It is very true that our chief Happiness consists in thus glorifying God: but that this is the sole, or even chief Reason for our doing it, must not be allowed. Whatever become of our Interest; whether our Advantages be greater or less; Truth is Truth, and Right is Right; demanding, and indeed deserving, the Attention, Veneration, and Observance of every Moral Agent, from its own essential Excellence, and intrinsic Authority. In short; to act conformably hereto, and make it our Supreme End; is, I am persuaded, in the truest and most proper Sense of the Word, glorifying God; to whom it belongs, and whose Nature it is, essentially and immutably.

ONCE more; whereas it is objected, that though in the Idea of Rectitude the Deity

Deity appears more awfull ; yet in that of Benevolence he appears more amiable ; the Answer is obvious. Awfulness and Amiability are no way inconsistent. If the Notion of Rectitude represents the Deity as awfull ; which in a proper Sense of the Word is just and fitting ; it also represents Him as infinitely amiable. A Being who is supposed never to act arbitrarily, never partially, never weakly ; but in all his Dealings and Proceedings with a whole Universe of Creatures, is ever directed by perfect Reason, Order, and Truth ; is, I think, not only the most glorious, but the most lovely Character, that can possibly enter into the Mind either of Man or Angel. Nothing can be conceived more excellent in itself, or more suitable to the Divine Majesty.—To make the Advancement of our Interest the Measure of Amiability, and the Rule of Goodness ; is the way to manifest, not Divine Perfections, but Human Imperfections. More Zeal for God's Glory, and less for our own Advantage, would soon rectify this Manner of thinking. In such Inquiries as these, it would be proper, as much as may be, to lay aside our Sensibility ; and taking Counsel only of our Understandings, to consider carefully wherein the highest Perfection of a Moral Agent consists. If we find, as surely we must, that supposing him acting from meer undirected

undirected Will, or a physical Propension, or indeed any Principle independent on Truth and Reason, cannot be the most perfect Way of acting; nor in Reality any Moral Perfection at all; we shall never ascribe it to the Deity, whatever Natural Good might be expected from it.

WE are such indigent, and at the same Time such frail and faulty Creatures; that we are very apt to confine the Moral Perfection of the Deity to the Ideas of Benevolence and Mercy: and oftentimes we frame such Conceptions of both, as are rather agreeable to our Wants and Wishes, than to our impartial Judgments. Such Benevolence and Mercy as are directed by right Reason, and limited by Truth, ought abundantly to satisfy us. Divine Rectitude can neither be unmindfull of our Wants, nor overlook the Imbecility of our Natures. Every Thing that really belongs to our Case will be regarded, and all reasonable Allowances made. But as to unreasonable Allowances and Concessions; we both deceive ourselves, and derogate from the Honour of God, whenever we expect them.

—In earthly Parents are daily to be seen affectionate Indulgences, and soft Compliances, not agreeable to Reason, nor consistent with it. Instead of consulting their Understandings, they are determined by their Bowels. They readily restore to Favour, not only Those

who are proper Objects of Favour, but Those who are not ; heaping upon them mischievous Kindnesses without Measure, or Distinction. In this manner they act, not because it is just, and right, and fit ; but because they relent, and are hurried away by fond Instincts and over-ruling Affections. Such Proceedings as these are below even Human Wisdom : how much more Divine ?

IT seems to me highly improbable, that the Will of the Deity should be undirected even in the Creation and original Constitution of the World. To suppose the Creator fixing and ranging his Creatures arbitrarily, and without Rule ; appears not consistent with the Perfection of his Conduct. Nothing can be more absurd than to imagine an infinitely wise Being determining and acting without Reason ; except in such Cases as admit of none. Whether the Powers and Capacities of his Creatures should be equal or unequal, could certainly be no indifferent Matter. The latter, we find, was determined ; and undoubtedly there was good Reason for it, whether we be able to discover it, or not. Perhaps various Reasons might concur in recommending such a Constitution. But to suppose it resulting from meer Will, is manifestly injurious to the Divine Wisdom.—If any one certain Order of the Universe be more agreeable to Truth than another ; it may justly be concluded

cluded that such an Order would be approved and preferred on that very Account ; since it is natural to suppose, that a perfect Agent must intend the Perfection of his own Works. It is likewise equally certain, that a wise and good Creator must propose the Well-being of his Creatures. If that Order of the Universe which constitutes its Perfection, be productive of, or consistent with, the highest Degrees of Happiness ; there might so far be Grounds to conclude, that both these Ends are proposed in their utmost Extent. But if, on the contrary, the Perfection of the Universe will not admit of the utmost Possibilities of Natural Good ; the Consequence must be, I humbly apprehend, a suitable Limitation. That Scale of Beings, that Subordination of Creatures, which we find in Fact established ; as it manifestly contributes to the Order, and Beauty, and Perfection of the Whole ; so it appears no less manifestly inconsistent with such Communications of Good as fall within our Conceptions. Thus, for Instance, had Men been formed with Angelic Capacities ; they would have been qualified for higher Degrees of Happiness : and that, in all Probability, without diminishing, or any way interfering with the Enjoyments of Angels. But whatever further Reasons there might be against such a Constitution, which I shall not presume to guess at ; it appears evidently repugnant to the forementioned Order and

Perfection of the Universe; which plainly seem to require, not only an Inequality of the Powers and Capacities of Creatures; but a gradual Subordination through all the Degrees of Intelligence, Perception, and Life.

TE T how uncertain must be the Continuance of this, or any other Constitution; supposing it originally determined by undirected Will? In vain is it granted that certain Relations necessarily flow from the Original Frame of the World; if that Frame was the Result of a meer arbitrary Appointment. Neither the original Frame, nor the Relations consequent thereupon, can thus have any Stability. If there is every Moment full Power to produce a Change, and no Reason supposed to dissuade from it; which is the very Case, that we are considering; what should hinder us at any Time from apprehending a general Revolution? If the Divine Will produced the Universe, and modelled it as it is, without any Regard to Reason and Truth; why may not the same Will either change, or abolish it the same Way?

THE plain Truth is, that the Reasons and Relations of Things neither depend on the present Constitution of the World, nor on the Will of the Creator. They are, and must be, eternally the same; whatever Schemes be fixed, or Successions ordered. And as to moral

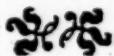
ral Relations in particular; they are manifestly independent, and immutable; in whatever State, or Situation, rational Creatures be supposed to be placed.—We may conceive indeed Human Nature so framed; that the Relations of Princes and Subjects, Parents and Children, Masters and Servants, &c. should have no Place in our Duty; but lie dormant, as it were, in respect of Mankind. Nevertheless these Relations, and all Truths connected with them, would be in themselves, that is, in the Divine Understanding, precisely what they now are.—Besides; however the intelligent World had been constituted; the main Lines, and general Duties of Morality must have been, in a great measure, always the same; whatever Difference might have appeared in the Specifications thereof. Whatever State of Things be supposed; all Rational Creatures must have found themselves obliged to the Love, Honour, Reverence, and Obedience of their Creator; to universal Justice, Fidelity, and Benevolence towards their Fellow-Creatures; and to subject all their Actions and Affections to the Rule and Supremacy of right Reason. For these general Obligations are necessarily and invariably incumbent on all intelligent Creatures, however constituted.

SHOULD we suppose moral Relations wholly dependent on the Divine Will; not to mention

mention any other Consequences at present, I would only ask, how rational Creatures could in any Case discover God's Will, by consulting the Reason of their own Minds? On this Supposition, no Duty whatever could possibly be found out without a Revelation: since what has no Dependance on Reason and Truth, can never be investigable by any Understanding. So that this Notion, at the same time that it subverts Morality, plucks up Natural Religion by the Roots.—I add further, that as there could be no Duty, on this Supposition, without a Revelation; so a fresh Revelation would be requisite every Day, or rather every Hour. For if the Rule of Men's Duty was meer Will; and that Will variable, as it must be, if there be nothing to fix it; it would be impossible for them to conclude from their present Duty, what their Obligations would be in any Point of Futurity.—In short; nothing seems plainer to me, than that the supreme Agent, at all Times, and in all Cases that admit of it, acts by Rule; and that this Rule is no other than his own sacred, eternal, and necessary Truth. Or in other Words, that his Will is neither self-governed; nor swayed by natural Affections or Propensities; but universally directed by his infinite and all-perfect Understanding.

IF it be alledged after all, that Truth and Reason can only direct either the Creator, or his

his Creatures, in the Choice and Pursuit of fit Means; but not in the End, the ultimate End proposed by them; I answer, as formerly, that to all moral Agents, considered as such, Reason is both End and Rule; both Direction, and Excitation: That Rectitude, or Conformity to Truth, is as properly the ultimate End of an intelligent Agent, as Pleasure is of a sensible one. That the Deity himself can have no Aim beyond this, no View superior to it; but from the Perfection of his Understanding must approve, preferably to all Things, this sacred self-excellent Object, this absolute and essential Good; and from the Purity of his Will invariably chuse, and eternally pursue it. This Divine End is primarily to be regarded by all his rational Creatures, as it is by himself. Herein consists, as we may humbly suppose, (for our Ideas will rise no higher) that transcendent Glory, on which all Eyes, and all Hearts, are to be kept fixed; which commands, controls, and over-rules, in the strictest Right, the Purposes of every Agent through the whole intellectual System: in a Word, that for ever ought to be the Scope of all Intention, and the Center of all Counsel.—But as this Point has been considered, tho' very imperfectly, in some of my former Pieces; so I shall have Occasion to resume it in the following Essay; which should indeed have been laid before the Reader without the Incumbrance of so tedious and disproportioned a Preface.



(111)

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WHATEVER Defects or Depravations may be ascribed to *Reason*, considered as a *Faculty* in Man; yet in its *objective* Acceptation, as it signifies the *Rule of Rectitude*, the eternal Reasons and Relations of Things; I see not, how it can ever be too much exalted, or admired.—In like manner, whatever Inconveniences may be objected to *Revelation*, or Blemishes found in it, as some of its Professors have managed and modelled it; yet considered in itself, abstracted from all Abuses and Adulterations; it tends to such excellent Purposes, affords such effectual Means, and is so wonderfully adapted to the Exigencies and Infirmities of our present State; that we can never be too tenacious of it, or thankful for it. The strictest and severest Reason will be so far from rejecting such a Revelation; that it will require Men to submit to it, and receive it *with all Readiness of Mind*.

IF this be a true Account of these two Divine Principles ; who can avoid being deeply concerned, to find them either represented as at Variance, or set up in Opposition to each other ? If there was any real Repugnance, or Inconsistence between them ; such a Proceeding might naturally be expected. But if the Case be quite otherwise, as I doubt not but it is ; must it not be a painful Consideration, to reflect, that Men's Minds should be thus divided between them, and drawn, as it were, into Parties ; magnifying and diminishing both in their turns ; even so far, as to confine all Obligation to the one, and deny it wholly in respect of the other ?

To aim at the Subversion of *Revealed Religion*, in order to promote the Credit and Authority of either *Natural Religion*, or *Morality* ; seems to me like pulling down a noble and beautiful Structure, meerly to lay open the Strength of its Foundations.—On the other hand, to propose the Establishment, or Advancement of *Revelation*, by weakning the Obligations of *Reason* and *Morality* ; appears to me just such an Undertaking, as it would be to undermine a Fabric, with a View to support and strengthen it.—Into neither of these Schemes can I ever enter. Not into the former ; because tho' the Rule of *Reason*, or System of *Moral Truth*, be absolutely perfect in itself, and therefore incapable of any Amendments ; yet in respect of

the corrupt and degenerate State of Mankind, many additional Helps are wanting ; fresh Lights, subordinate Rules, preparatory Methods, and proper Encouragements ; to direct, support, and fix Men in their Duty. Not into the latter ; because no *Religion*, whether *Natural* or *Revealed*, can possibly stand secure on any other Foundation, than that of *Reason* and *Truth* ; as will afterwards be more particularly shewn.

IT seems therefore to be an useful, or rather necessary Work, to endeavour, I will not say to promote an Union between *Reason* and *Revelation*, for that is needless ; but to shew that they actually are united, and at perfect Amity with each other : to point out the entire Agreement between them ; and, by consequence, to draw the Friends of Either to the Interest of Both. Whatever promotes the Cause of Revealed Religion, befriends Morality ; and whatever strengthens Morality, adds Force to Religion.

I observe, not without Surprize, some Authors of great Merit and Distinction, acknowledging indeed the *Rule of Truth*, considered as a *Rule* ; but denying it at the same time to be properly a *Law* to any Rational Beings. That is, they look upon it as a Rule not really *obligatory*, but merely *directive*. And if this be the Truth of the Case, I verily think there neither is, nor can be, any such Thing in Nature as either *Moral*, or *Religious Obligation*,

properly so called. If *Truth* and *Reason* do not of themselves *oblige* moral Agents; as far as I am able to discover, nothing else can.

— Towards clearing this Matter, and answering the forementioned Intention, I shall briefly endeavour to make out these three Points.

— *First*, that *Reason* binds or *obliges*, in the strictest Sense of the Word, all Moral Agents.

— *Secondly*, that considering Men in that Capacity, the Obligations of *Religion* depend on the Obligations of *Reason*, and are wholly founded thereupon.—*Thirdly*, that *Religion*, whether *Natural* or *Revealed*, stands very firmly and securely on this Ground.

i. IN order to discover whether, and how far, Reason *obliges* Moral Agents; it will be previously necessary to fix the Idea of *Obligation*.—Whatever be the true Idea of it, most certainly it is different from that of *Compulsion*. It must be somewhat perfectly consistent with *Natural Liberty*. Whatever Obligations a Man may lie under; he is evidently as *free* to determine his own Actions, as if he lay under none at all. And indeed his Power of Self-determination, being a *physical Power*, cannot possibly be destroyed or diminished by any *Reasons* or Considerations whatever. They may induce, incline, or persuade; but since they have no natural Efficiency, they cannot offer the least Violence to the Agent. There is no Danger therefore of confounding the

the Ideas of Obligation and Compulsion.—

On the other hand, it is equally evident, that all Obligations affect the Mind more or less, and in some measure alter the State of it. For since they are entirely of a relative Nature ; relative, I mean, to the Mind of the Agent ; and subsist no where else : it plainly follows, that the Mind must be affected by them, and cannot be in the same State with, or without them. We are therefore to consider how they affect the Mind, and what Change is produced in it ; either in respect of its *active*, or *passive* Powers. The *passive* Powers are summed up in *Intelligence*, and *Sensibility* ; in respect of which, the Mind appears, if I mistake not, susceptible of distinct Obligations. The *active* Power, or *Will*, tho' uncomelled, as we have already seen ; yet is affected in both Kinds ; as being naturally moved and excited by every Appearance of Good.

BUT to proceed ; the Mind, as *Sensible*, perceives and enjoys *Pleasure*, or Natural Good ; which being found upon Tryal essentially grateful thereto ; cannot fail to recommend it self. Therefore it is necessarily liked when present, and desired when absent. *Pain*, or Natural Evil, is the Reverse ; and by Consequence is necessarily disliked, and shunned. The Mind cannot possibly approve Pain, or disapprove Pleasure, in themselves. It has indeed a natural Power of submitting to the former, and rejecting the latter ; and accordingly, on certain

tain Occasions, does both. Nevertheless, in their own Nature, both Objects are fixed and unchangeable ; the one unavoidably agreeable, and the other odious.—Conscious of this, the Mind plainly and perpetually perceives a *Reason*, a *Motive*, or whatever you will call it, for its Pursuit of *Pleasure*, and Aversion from *Pain*. This *Perception* naturally moves and excites the Will ; and thereby brings the Mind of the Agent into that State, that Disposition to act, wherein, I presume, *Obligation* consists. And forasmuch as the Reason or Motive, in this Case, is *external* ; and directly concerns only the *Sensible* part of his Nature ; therefore I term this kind of *Obligation external*, or *Sensible*.—If it be strictly proper to say, as doubtless it is, that Man is *obliged* to promote his own Interest, Happiness, or Natural Good ; the Term must, I think, be understood as here explained : nor do I see how it can admit of any other Meaning. On the other hand, the Thing it self is very plain and clear ; however it may be denominated or distinguished. Such a Motive perceived, must affect and influence the Agent in a certain manner, and bring his Mind into a State distinct from all other States, whatever Name be given it.—If it be alledged, that according to this Account, Man is obliged to pursue every Object of Sensible Good which appears before him ; I answer that it does by no means follow : but it would follow, and be

be certainly true ; if no Superior Obligation intervened to hinder it. Any particular Gratification may be inconsistent with a Man's general Interest ; and thereby overruled ; not yet to mention other Obligations of a still higher Nature.

AGAIN ; the Mind as *intelligent* perceives *Truth*, or the necessary *Relations* of Things. More particularly the *Relations* subsisting between *Mind and Mind* constitute what we call *Moral Truth*. And as clearly to perceive and apprehend these Relations, is real Knowledge ; so to act conformably to them is true or right Practice. This *Rectitude* of Action every Understanding necessarily approves ; as being essentially *good*, and *self-eligible*. And the more regular and perfect the Mind of any Agent is ; the higher his Approbation rises, and the more he is charmed with the Excellence thereof. Though Men are very imperfect and corrupt ; and though they have Liberty, or a natural Power of determining and acting in Opposition to Truth ; yet nevertheless they cannot avoid approving this *Moral Fitness*, or Rectitude of Action. All Deviations from it they are sure to condemn in Others ; and, sooner or later, even in themselves.—Here then is a *Reason*, an *internal Reason*, plainly perceived, for acting agreeably to so just and amiable a Rule. Being intrinsically right, and fit, and worthy of every Agent's Choice ; it naturally affects his Mind, and

and moves his Will to a suitable Compliance. This State of Mind, produced by the Perception of such a Reason for Action, is, as I apprehend, the true Idea of *Moral Obligation*.

IF it be asked, what is our *Motive*, our Inducement, to observe the *Rule of Reason and Truth*; I answer, *itself*. It is *absolute and essential Good*; and therefore an Object of the purest Affection in the World. We pursue Natural Good, because it is *good for us*; and Moral Good, because it is *good in itself*. If an Affection for the former be necessary, so is an Affection for the latter; at least, in all undepraved Minds. And to ask, why a Man chooses and pursues the Object of his Affection; is a Question equally needless and absurd: And still more so, when the Object is supremely amiable. As *Pleasure* is the proper Object and ultimate End of *Sensible Agents*; so are *Truth* and *Rectitude of intelligent and moral Agents*. But to suppose *Pleasure*, or *Natural Good*, the ultimate End of any Agent, considered in his intellectual and moral Capacity, is to confound the Ideas of *Rectitude* and *Utility*, and to transfer Objects from one Faculty to another: it is to make *Truth* and *Virtue* ministerial to *Pleasure*, and the *Glory of God* subordinate to the *Convenience* and *Benefit* of His Creatures.

CONFORMITY to Reason and Truth is not only *relatively*, but *absolutely fit*: not only fit to promote Happiness; but originally, essentially,

fentially, and necessarily fit. For why must this Term be confined to a *relative* Signification, any more than the *æquum* and *rectum* of the Antients? However; instead of *Fitness*, let *Rectitude* be used; or any other Word of an absolute Signification. It is not the Word, but the Thing, for which I contend.—And surely *right* Action, and *profitable* Action, are very distinct Ideas; whatever Coincidence may be found between them. The former would still have been *Moral Good*; would still have engaged the Understanding, and attracted the Will; even supposing the Wisdom and Goodness of God had not annexed to it *natural Good*. It is very true that Pleasure accompanies and follows Virtue, both by Nature, and by Divine Appointment: but yet whoever pursues Virtue solely or chiefly with a View to that Pleasure, diminishes both. The purest Pleasure, and noblest Satisfaction in the World, spring from the doing of *right* Actions, because they are *right*: that is, from a disinterested Love of Truth and Rectitude.

CONCERNING the Eligibility of this excellent Object, I have already observed, that it must and will speak for itself. There is no other way of proving either natural or moral Good; than by referring every Man to his own Perceptions. Thither the Appeal must lie, in both Cases; and every Percipient judge for himself. And as the Perception of *natural Good* may be obstructed by various Dis-

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temperatures of Body, or Mind; so the Perception of *moral Good* may be hindered or impaired by Inattention, Prejudice, or Vice. Otherwise it cannot fail to recommend itself in the fullest manner; as being, in its own Nature, peculiarly amiable, and choice-worthy.

— Again; if, this being admitted, it be nevertheless inquired, why, excluding the Obligations of Religion, a Man may not, in any Instance, as innocently reject *Moral Good*, as *Natural*; and counteract *Reason*, as well as forego *Pleasure*; the Answer is, that a lesser Obligation is null and void in course, whenever it interferes with a greater. When a good Reason, of any kind, appears for the Rejection of any particular Pleasure; it may not only be rejected innocently, but laudably. In so doing, the Agent only quits an inferior, to follow a superior Obligation. But no Rule, no Law, no Authority in the World, can control, or cancel a Moral Duty. The Obligation of Truth and Reason is supreme: therefore it gives way to nothing, and ever remains inviolable.

THAT Virtue stands in need of being supported and encouraged, in such a World as this, and among such Creatures as Men; is certainly and notoriously true: and if there be any who think otherwise; they must either be very inconsiderate, or strongly prejudiced. But this is not the Point before us. We are not inquiring after the Wants, Defects,

fects, and Imperfections of *Human Nature*; but into the Perfection and Excellence of *Virtue* itself. And considered in this Light, it is abundantly self-supported; nor can any Recommendations equal its own. It intrinsically deserves, that all Rational Beings submit to it, and be governed by it. As every *Understanding* worships it; so every *Will* ought to fall down before it. To refuse Subjection to *right Reason*, when clearly seen and known; may be looked upon as the very Essence of Rebellion. It is violating the great and fundamental Law of Heaven and Earth. It is striking at the Foundation of all Authority whatever; as will be shewn afterwards. Even the Throne of God rests upon it; and his Prerogative is supported by it.—In short; *Reason*, objectively considered, is not only amiable; but venerable, sacred, and divine. It is not only the Rule, the sole Rule of God's own Actions; which would render it sacred, if it were not so in itself; but moreover it is *Divine*, in the strictest Sense: all necessary Truth being an essential Efflux or Emanation from the infinite and all-perfect Mind. Hence it appears not only possessed of the highest Worth, Beauty, and Excellence; but invested with a supreme and absolute Authority: not only attractive, but really awful. Of which no other Account can, I think, be given; than the Divineness of the Object. Every Ray of Truth and Reason seems to par-

ticipate of the Majesty of that Being ; to whom it all belongs, and whose Attribute it is.— If this be thought carrying on the Matter too far, even into the Borders of Enthusiasm ; tho' I cannot be of that Mind, I am content to retreat to my former Ground. What I insist upon is, that Moral Truth and Rectitude are Self-good, and Self-eligible ; influencing the Minds, and attracting the Wills of all moral Agents ; and thereby bringing them into a State of *Obligation*. If this be not the true Idea of Obligation ; I shall be glad to learn what is. In the mean time let us suppose it to be so, and see what follows from it.

IF then the Rule of Truth be thus sacred, thus absolutely and essentially good ; it must be, in the foregoing Sense of the Word, of universal *Obligation*. For it must affect and influence all Minds, in proportion to their Perfection and Purity : From whence it follows, that it not only *directs*, but, strictly speaking, *obliges* the *Deity* himself. And not only so ; but the Obligation of it must be infinitely stronger in respect of Him, than of any imperfect and created Agents. This, I humbly suppose, must be the Case ; partly for the Reason above-mentioned ; and partly because He comprehends the Whole of this sacred Rule, and views it in all its Glory.— If it be, as according to all our Ideas it must be, the best, and fittest, and noblest Rule, that a perfect Agent can follow ; can we doubt either

ther the Reality, or Sufficiency, of this very Motive? Among such frail Beings as we are, the strongest *Reasons* for Action are often but feeble *Motives*: which is chiefly to be ascribed to the Importunities of Sense, and the Usurpations of Appetite. But a Being infinitely pure and perfect, rational and righteous, regards nothing so readily, hears nothing so willingly, as the Voice of Reason, and the Dictates of Truth. By these He is not only *directed*; but *induced*, and prevailed upon to act according to their Directions. They not only influence his holy Will; but are, I believe, his chief, if not his sole Motives. And this appears to me not only more probable than any other Supposition; but also more conducive to God's Glory. For I am not able to conceive any Thing so glorious, or God-like; as a perpetual Adherence to Truth, and ever acting righteously, for Righteousness sake.—Besides; since all Moral Truths are really and strictly divine; His acting in Conformity thereto, is only acting in Conformity to Himself. And surely it can no way derogate from the Perfection of his Conduct, but very much the contrary; to suppose, that his *Will* is obliged and governed by his unerring *Understanding*.

IF it be argued, as indeed it is; that the Deity must be incapable of Obligation, because He has *no Superior to prescribe Laws to Him*; I beg it may be considered, that nei-

ther *Superiority*, nor *Supremacy of Power* can confer any Right to Obedience. And as to a *Superiority of Wisdom and Goodness*; that indeed implies Authority, presupposing the *Obligations of Reason and Truth*; but not otherwise, as will immediately be shewn. Were it therefore possible to suppose that the Deity could have any Superior; no Obligation would follow from such a Supposition, but what actually is in full Force without it. For if *Reason* be *obligatory* in its own Nature; then it must *oblige* at first Hand, as well as at Second; the supreme, as well as subordinate Agents: and that in Proportion to the Degree wherein it is possessed. On the contrary, if Reason be not thus *obligatory*; then it can neither *oblige* at first, nor at second Hand; neither the supreme, nor subordinate Agents. Since then the Deity is possessed of Reason and Truth, in all possible Perfection, and to an infinite Degree; I humbly conclude He must be infinitely *obliged* by it: Whereas, were He not supreme; his Perfections being finite, his Obligations would be so too. And as to that Regard and Honour which, on such a Supposition, would be due from Him to Another; they are equally due from Him to Himself. He is obliged to honour his own supreme Perfections, as much as He would be, supposing they belonged to another Agent. This I am more willing to observe, as it seems to me that the Glory of God, as intended and promoted

moted by Himself, is generally misconceived ; and often explained quite away. His glorifying Himself and his own Perfections, appears to me not only a real distinct End ; but the first and supreme ; to which all other Ends are, and ought to be subordinate ; and that in Conformity to Truth itself : which eternally requires, that every Being be considered and regarded, even by himself, according to the Perfections which he is really possessed of. And as Truth requires that God be infinitely self-honoured ; so that Honour seems principally to consist in an inviolable Deference to Truth. By perpetually regarding and conforming to Truth, which is his own Attribute ; He ever glorifies Himself : and indeed manifests at the same Time, both the infinite Perfection of his Understanding, and the absolute Rectitude of his Will.—But to return ; the foregoing Reasoning will perhaps appear in a clearer Light, when we have gone through the *second* Point which I proposed to examine.

2. HERE then I must endeavour to shew, that considering Men in their intellectual and moral Capacity, *the Obligations of Religion depend, and are entirely founded on the Obligations of Reason.* Or in other Words, that Religion binds Men, as Moral Agents, only in virtue of Truth and Reason.—By *Religion* I mean Obedience to God's Will and Commands, considered as such ; whether the Reasons
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of them be known, or unknown. It is allowed on all Hands, that God hath an unquestionable Right to the Obedience of his Creatures. The Question therefore is, what is the Foundation of that Right ; wherein religious Obligation consists, or what it is that binds Men to obey the Will of God. As far as I am able to discover ; God's Authority, and Man's Obedience, must be founded on the Creator's *Benefits* ; or the *Perfections* of his Nature ; or the *Sanctions* annexed to his Laws. All the Grounds of Authority, and the Principles of Obedience, that I can think of, are here comprehended and included. Let us therefore consider them in the Order wherein I have mentioned them.

OF God's *Benefits*, Creation has been commonly reckoned the chief ; but why, and on what account, is hard to discover. For if it be considered abstractedly ; it is so far from being the greatest Benefit, that it is really none at all. Nay, it might be looked upon as a Hardship, a Grievance, an Injury ; if Creatures were placed in such Circumstances, as to have unavoidably more Evil in their Lot than Good. In Fact, this is not the Case, as we have just Reason to conclude, of any Creature in the Universe. And as to Man ; he is so happily distinguished, and has such and so many Blessings heaped upon him ; that he neither knows how to number them, nor value them as he ought. Tho' therefore meer Existence cannot, in strictness, be said to bring him under any Obligation ;

tion; yet such an Existence, such a Condition as he is blessed with, cannot fail of binding him to Gratitude and Obedience. His Creator is to be considered by him, as his supreme and most bountiful Benefactor: and as such, to be loved, honoured, reverenced, and obeyed. I add *obeyed*, because it is essential to Gratitude, to endeavour to please a Benefactor, by acting agreeably to his Will.—But then it is to be considered, that no Benefits can give the Benefactor a Title to absolute and unconditional Obedience. If he be supposed to will or require any Thing that is repugnant to *Truth*; the Obligations of Gratitude are so far nulled, or at least suspended; that, in such Instances, no Compliance is, or can be, due. I am very sensible our Divine Benefactor can never will any Thing of this Kind. Nevertheless I judge the foregoing Observation not impertinent; as it points out the supreme and ultimate Obligation; and plainly shews, that Nothing can bind in Opposition to *Truth*.—Any further Limitation than this, I absolutely deny. For supposing, but not granting, that God has given Men any Commands so intirely indifferent, as to have no Tendency either Moral or Natural; I fear not to affirm, that They are indispensibly bound to observe them: Gratitude means nothing, if it do not oblige Men to Submission and Compliancy in the Case here supposed. By obeying those Commands which visibly tend to Natural or Moral Good, Men may

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shew their Love of *Truth*, or their Love of *Themselves*; but where is their Gratitude towards *God*, if they slight his *Will*, merely because it is nothing but his Will? This is contrary to the established Ideas of Gratitude between Man and Man; much more of that Gratitude which is due to the Supreme Benefactor. Whether it be probable that God has actually given any such Commands; is another Point, and will more properly be considered in another Place. At present I shall only observe, that it is not to be doubted but such Commands have been given, as are *apparently*, tho' not *really* of this nature; and that with the utmost Propriety, Wisdom, and Goodness.

BUT to proceed; this Principle of religious Obedience, whatever be the Extent of it, manifestly derives all its Force from *Reason* and *Truth*. As God is our kind Creator, and gracious Benefactor; we find ourselves bound in Gratitude studiously to fulfill his Will, and regard his good Pleasure. Very just, and right, and fit. But is not this plainly a *necessary Truth*; a *moral Fitness*, resulting from the immutable *Reasons* and *Relations* of Things? And must not this *Moral Fitness* be consequently allowed to *oblige*, of itself, and in its own Nature, independently of all other Laws and Obligations? If such *Reasons* and *Truths* carry no Obligation along with them, according to the Opinion which I am opposing; what is that Principle founded on, which we have been

been considering ; or what is there to support it ? For how can Men be bound to obey God, in virtue of such Reasons and Considerations, as are supposed to be altogether *unobligatory*, and without Force ? On this Supposition, as far as I can perceive, Gratitude and Piety are empty Names, and meer Nullities.—It has been alledged, that *Moral Fitnesses* oblige Men meerly in virtue of the *Divine Will*. To say back again, that the *Divine Will* obliges meerly in virtue of Truth and *Moral Fitness* ; would be running into a shameful Circle. One of these Propositions must be false. If the latter ; I flatter my self we are in a fair Way to discover it, and be convinced of it. As yet, I think, it has not appeared. On the contrary, it seems very evident, that whatever Strength there may be in the foregoing Principle ; it is wholly owing to the intrinsic Obligations of Reason and Truth. Let us try Another.

Is then our religious Obedience founded on the Consideration of God's *Perfections* ; more especially his infinite Wisdom and Goodness ? Are we bound to obey Him on account of his being supremely and perfectly capable of governing the World ; as He throughly understands, and inflexibly adheres to Right and Truth, at all Times, and in all Cases ; and as He fully comprehends the true Interest of all his Creatures, and perpetually promotes it ? Such a Governor must have an unquestionable *Right*, an unrivalled Claim to universal Sub-

jection and Obedience ; if any Regard be due to *Truth* and *Reason* ; which clearly exhibit it to the Minds, and loudly proclaim it in the Ears of all intelligent Creatures. But if *Truth* and *Reason* have no real *Authority* ; if they cannot, of themselves, lay any *Obligation* on Moral Agents ; then the foregoing Difficulty returns upon us, and this *Right* likewise, strong and sacred as it is, appears without any visible Foundation. For if an *immediate* Submission to *Truth* be not strictly our Duty ; a *mediate* one certainly cannot. If *Reason* and *Moral Fitness* bind us not ; how can we be bound to obey God's Commands, merely on Account of the *Rectitude* of his Will, and the *Wisdom* of his Government ? Can there be any Weight in that Authority, which is derived from a Principle of no Force, and void of all *Obligation* ? If Homage and Subjection be ever due to the Supreme Legislator, because he governs the World by the eternal *Rule of Truth and Righteousness* ; must not that *Rule* be the original *Law*, as well as the Basis of all *Authority* ? In short, to maintain that Obedience is due to God, because his *Law is the Truth* ; and to deny at the same Time the *Obligation of Truth* ; appears to me such an Inconsistency as can never be cleared up. To found *Religion* on *Truth*, is to found it on a *Rock* ; if Truth be sacred and obligatory in its own Nature : but if not ; it is building Religion on *Sand*, and supporting it with a *broken Reed*.—Perhaps this Conclusion

clusion may be thought too hastily drawn ; as one of the forementioned Principles yet remains to be examined.

THOUGH therefore right *Reason*, *Truth*, and *Fitness*, be supposed incapable of *obliging* Men ; and, by Consequence, of upholding Religion ; yet may not this be really and effectually done by the *Sanctions* annexed to the Divine Laws ? If *Truth* cannot bind Men ; does it follow that *Power* cannot ?—That the *Sanctions* of Religion do really bind and *oblige* Men, I readily grant : but how, and in what Capacity ? Not in their *Moral*, but *Sensible* Capacity. I have already acknowledged, and maintained ; that, considered as *Sensible Agents*, Men are actually *obliged* to seek *Natural Good*, and avoid *Natural Evil* ; the one being a necessary Object of Desire, the other of Aversion. But what has this to do with *Moral Obligation* ? Can the *Sanctions* of Religion, or any *Sensible Motives*, bind the *Consciences* of Men, or take any Hold of them ? They are very proper to work on our *Hopes* and *Fears* ; and even necessary for the Government of such degenerate Creatures as we are : but, I presume, they have no more Concern with *Conscience*, than *Truth* has with *Sense*. That can only be affected by *internal Reasons* ; which would bind *Moral Agents*, even tho' they were void of *Sensibility*.

WHEN the Apostle is pressing *Subjection to the Higher Powers* ; can we suppose that he means by *Wrath*, and *Conscience*, one and the same

same Principle ? Is it not evident that he considers them as *distinct Obligations* ? And tho' he be speaking, not of the Supreme, and Divine *Ruler* ; but of subordinate and human ones ; that makes no Difference in the present Argument, but what is in Favour of it. It holds true *à fortiori*, that we *must needs be subject* to the Supreme Ruler, *not only for Wrath, but also for Conscience Sake*. We are required to obey Human Authority ; not only with a View to avoid the Pains and Penalties of the Law ; but also, and chiefly, from a conscientious Regard to Divine Authority. In like manner, we are to obey *God's Authority*, not merely with a View to the *Sanctions* annexed to his Laws ; but also, and chiefly, from a conscientious Regard to *Truth, Reason, and Rectitude*.

NOTHING therefore is plainer, than that the Obligations of *Conscience* ought not to be confounded with those which arise from the *Punishments* denounced against Disobedience. The former, however distinct, are indeed implied in the latter. For as Punishment necessarily implies Guilt ; so Guilt necessarily implies a Breach of some antecedent Obligation. No Man can deserve either well, or ill ; otherwise than by discharging or violating the Obligations incumbent on him. These therefore are necessarily presupposed in the *Sanctions* themselves ; which otherwise could neither be justified, nor understood. In

a Moral Sense; Obedience to God's Authority is equally a Duty, with them, or without them.—If God had annexed no Sanctions to his Laws; will any Man say they might have been innocently transgressed? Whoever asserts this, must maintain that all *Authority* and *Dominion* are founded in *Power*: The Consequence of which must be, that Tyrants and Usurpers, Pyrates and Robbers, have a Right to every Thing they lay their Hands on. I beg leave to add, that if the Author of the *Leviathan* really believed this Principle, as he professed and taught it; he must, I think, have laboured under the greatest Confusion of Ideas, that ever befel any Understanding.

BUT to return; how shall we get clear of the Difficulty before us? If the Creator's Authority over his Creatures be not founded on *Power*; it must be founded on *Right*. And if it be founded on *Right*; must not that Right be valid and binding in and from itself? If that which constitutes the Authority, be, in its own Nature, unobligatory; must not the Authority be so too? But since God's Authority is out of the Question; we must either acknowledge the Force and Validity of that Principle, for which I am contending; or find out some other Grounds for the Obligations of Religion. How this may be done; is, I confess, beyond my Comprehension.

If it be said, that without any Regard to the *Rule of Reason*, and the *Law of Truth*;

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the *Will* of God is obligatory in its own Nature, and from its own Perfection ; I have already observed, that a perfect Will ungoverned by Reason, and undirected by Truth, is an inconsistent and repugnant Idea : forasmuch as a Will self-guided, and self-governed, argues the greatest Imperfection, and can only belong to the most arbitrary Agents. Such a *Will* supported by *Power*, is the very Idea of *Tyranny* ; and by Consequence, diametrically opposite to the Perfections of the Deity. No Agent can be *obliged* by such a *Will*, to any Thing further, than providing for his own Safety, and guarding, as well as he can, against the mischievous Effects of it.

IN short ; if *Morality* be not the Basis of *Religion*, and *Truth* the Basis of *Morality* ; I am not able to frame any Idea of *Obligation*, either religious or moral. To resolve both ultimately into the *Will* of God ; seems to me inverting the Natures of Things, and turning their very Essences upside down. It is to represent *Understanding* as governed by *Will*, instead of *Will* governed by *Understanding* : from whence it would follow, that Virtue and Religion were absolutely precarious, and changeable at Pleasure. On the contrary, I have endeavoured to shew, that *Truth* must oblige independently of God's *Will* ; and not God's *Will* independently on *Truth*. Securely may it be affirmed, that if it were possible for Him to will that *Treachery* and *Ingratitude*

tude should become our Duty, instead of *Gratitude* and *Fidelity*; such a Will would be unobligatory and void: which it could never be in any Case, or upon any Supposition, if all Obligation depended ultimately on his Will. On the other hand, should it be supposed, that God was pleased to suspend his *Authority* for a certain Term, and leave every Thing to its own Nature; will any Man say, that during this supposed Term, *Gratitude* and *Ingratitude*, *Fidelity* and *Treachery*, would be of equal Worth, and equal Obligation? As well might he identify *Pain* and *Pleasure*, *Light* and *Darkness*. From these Suppositions, impossible as they are, it plainly appears, that *Truth* obliges not in Virtue of God's *Authority*; but God's *Authority* in Virtue of *Truth*; which is therefore the real Ground of all religious Obligation.

3. THE *Third* Point to be proved, is, that, *on this Ground, Religion, whether Natural or Revealed, stands very firm and secure.*— But how and wherein *secure*? Will *Religion* work its way, and prevail every where, merely by the Influence of *Reason*, and the Power of *Truth*? Is it likely, without any other Recommendation or Enforcement, to meet with a general Reception among Mankind? I have already acknowledged the contrary. However sufficient *Truth* may be for maintaining its own Authority, and that of *Religion*, among

superior Beings, and in other Worlds ; it is not pretended to be so in *this*. The Fierceness and Headyness of Mankind will not ordinarily be restrained by the mild Laws, and pure Dictates of *Reason*. Tho' they are *rational* Creatures ; yet they are corrupt and degenerate. Their Appetites are too strong, and their Passions too furious, to be managed and held in by any intellectual Reins.

THIS, and much more, is confessedly true. But what follows ? Nothing but what will as readily be admitted. I mean, that the *Sanctions* of Religion are very proper, and even necessary, for the Support of Virtue, and the Maintenance of God's Authority, among Men. But because the Bonds of Truth alone are seldom sufficient to hold us ; are they therefore to be taken quite away ? Are the Obligations of Reason to be looked upon as meer Cobwebs ; because we are such wild Creatures as to break through them every Moment ? By this Rule, not only the *internal*, but even the *external* Obligations of Religion must be excluded, and pronounced void. No Sanctions, whether natural or positive, have hitherto proved generally effectual. Both are neglected, and counteracted continually ; and, in all Probability, will be so ; till the Corruptions of Human Nature be remedied, and a Reformation accomplished. No Conclusion therefore can be drawn from hence, against either the Reality, or Validity of those Obligations which I have been considering.

LET

LET us then go on to inquire, what Idea we can have of *Religion*, supposing its whole Force to consist in its *Sanctions*; and that it carried no Obligation with it, but what was derived from thence. Even *Revealed Religion*, notwithstanding the Weight, Awfulness, and Solemnity of its Sanctions; would, on this Supposition, appear to great Disadvantage. It would be little more, I presume, than a *Bond of Indemnity*, and a meer *Contract of Interest*. If Christians disclaim and disavow all Reasons for well-doing, all Grounds of Obedience, besides those of their own Safety and Advantage; how will they avoid incurring the Imputations of *mercenary Obedience*, and bought Piety? And is this consulting the Honour of God, and maintaining the Dignity of Religion? Can it ever flourish, or produce Fruits worthy of it; while it is grafted entirely on *Sensibility* and *Selfishness*?— I have elsewhere contended earnestly in Behalf of these religious Motives; and shall ever be ready to do it again: but to lay all this Stress on them, and magnify them at the Expence of Religion itself; appears one of those Extremes which I shall ever industriously shun.—Let Religion by all means be attended with these Sanctions, and supported by them: but let not these Sanctions be made to justle out Religion, and placed in its Stead. Let it be guarded and strengthened by them; but not degraded.

It seems to me most evident, that we ought to obey God, as well as worship Him, *in Spirit and Truth*. Chiefly, I mean, from a Sense of Spiritual Obligations, and a Consciousness of the *Truth* and *Fitness* of such a Behaviour. This is honouring both Him, and Religion, much more than could be done by meer stipulated Obedience.—To reject indeed, and despriate the Rewards of Religion; to profess a Contempt of them, and represent them as useless or needless; must I think, be great Folly, or great Affectation. Even Truth requires that we regard them in Proportion to their real Worth. But it neither requires, nor allows us, to be wholly influenced by them. It will not suffer us to discard the *Moral Principle*, in order to give them the full Possession of our Minds. On the contrary *that Obligation* is ever to be acknowledged Supreme; and regarded and reverenced accordingly. The Question is not, which Principle is, in Fact, more prevalent and successful among frail Men; but which is, in it self, more pure and perfect, more generous and divine. However Men may want to be encouraged, or awed, by Rewards and Punishments; which is more especially their Case under Difficulties and Temptations; still it must be owned, that the more *conscientious* and *disinterested* their Obedience is; the more acceptable it must be to God, and more worthy in itself.

THIS

THIS *internal Obligation* is indeed the Life and Soul of all Religion. To obey God from a Love of *Truth*, and a Principle of *Rectitude*; is the Perfection of Obedience, and the very Religion of *Angels*. Ours too it must be, if we aspire to any Resemblance of their Purity. Whatever be our Religion; it surely concerns us to take heed, that we do not maim and deform it; by striking at those Principles, which are the *Sinews* of all Virtue and Goodness. I should rather have said, that we do not *murder* it; by reaching a Wound into its very *Vitals*. For this indeed is the Case. If the *Obligations* of *Truth* and *Reason* be once dissolved; *Religion* must languish, and die in course. The true *Power* of it is gone; tho' the *Form* remains. Instead of a living Principle, it becomes a breathless Carcase: or rather a meer Machine; moved by Springs, and actuated by inferior Affections.

LET it not be supposed, that this Doctrine tends to the Diminution of those *Motives*, which are justly reckoned among the peculiar Blessings of *Christianity*. For as nothing of this kind is intended; so nothing here said will fairly admit of any such Construction. That Christianity has greatly befriended Mankind by heightning and ascertaining the Motives of Religion, is undeniably true: and it is equally true, that the World stood in great need of such Helps. But does it follow from hence, that the *Glory of God*, or in other Words,

Words, the Establishment of Truth and Righteousness, is not our *supreme End*? Because the highest and noblest Rewards are proposed to the Obedient; does it follow that they constitute the sole Principle of Obedience, and that we are under no Obligation but what arises from thence? Can it be supposed, that Christians are to be thus gloriously compensated, meerly for aiming at a Recompense, without Regard to any Thing else? If this can be maintained; then indeed the foregoing Doctrine must be erroneous. But, if I mistake not, such a Supposition is not only repugnant to Reason; but inconsistent with every Page of the Gospel. There Men are taught, not to *glorify God* in Subservience to their own *Interest*; but to pursue their own *Interest* in Subordination to *God's Glory*. This their *ultimate End*; this their *direct Aim*: all other Views *collateral*. There Rewards are propounded to Christians; not for seeking Rewards, and consulting their own Advantage; but for *Well-doing*: that is, without question, for discharging the Obligations of Virtue and Religion, antecedently incumbent on them.—In fine; the Sanctions of Religion are not Religion; neither are Tyes of Interest moral Obligations. Such Motives are fit *Helps*, and useful *Appendages*: but Truth and Rectitude are the very *Essence* of Religion. Whether then its Credit, Security, and Establishment, are more likely to be promoted by the Doctrine

trine here taught, or the contrary ; let the Reader judge.

BUT in order to gain further Light concerning this Matter ; it may be proper to subjoin a few more Observations touching both *Natural*, and *Revealed Religion*.—By *Natural Religion* I understand the Practice of Truth and Righteousness in Obedience to the Will of God. The Opposers of Revelation ordinarily confound this Idea with that of *Moral Virtue*. Which, in them, is the more to be wondered at ; as they profess such a rigorous Adherence to clear and distinct Ideas. And can any Ideas be more distinct, than acting in direct *Conformity to Truth*, and acting in Obedience to *God's Authority*? However the *Actions* may coincide ; these *Principles of Action* cannot possibly be the same. Tho' God's *Authority* be ultimately founded on *Truth*, and his Will ever obliges in virtue of Truth ; yet surely this is no Proof of Identity. *Moral Duties* flow immediately and primarily from Truth and Reason ; *religious Duties* mediately and secondarily. These depend immediately on the supreme *Will*. And tho' even this Will could not bind in Opposition to Reason ; yet it may and does bind in Cases where Reason is silent. Silent, I mean, as to the Precepts themselves ; tho' at the same Time loudly proclaiming the Authority of the Legislator. But this belongs to *revealed Religion*. I only mention it here to shew, that
tho'

tho' the Ground of Morality and Religion be ultimately the same ; yet they must be nevertheless distinct Principles of Action.—Do we not accordingly find, in Fact, that Actions morally good may be performed on either of these Principles ? That is, either in direct Obedience to the *Law of Truth* ; or the *God of Truth*. Nay, it is manifest that the Agent may actually propose both Intentions in one and the same Action.

BUT to proceed ; however *Morality* and *natural Religion* may be distinguished ; most certain it is, that they are strongly and indissolubly connected. A Being of infinite Perfection must necessarily approve what is *right*, and *fit* ; and disapprove the contrary. Whatever therefore is evidently conformable to Truth and Fitness, must be agreeable to God's Will : and, by Consequence, whatever is *morally good*, must be a Precept of *natural Religion*. On the other hand, every Precept of *natural Religion* must be morally good ; forasmuch as, without Revelation, the *Will of God* is only discoverable by *moral Goodness*.—The Validity and Authority of *Religion* can never be shaken, while *Reason* has really any Force to bind Men ; because *Reason* eternally requires all Obedience to the Divine *Will*, as well as Conformity to itself. But if the *Obligations of Reason* are disowned ; and looked upon as meer Philosophical Fancies, and abstract Shadows ; I see not, for my Part, how any

any Religion can be valid. External Force it may have, to work on Men's *Affections*; but internal Power for binding their *Consciences*, it can have none; as, I think, has been sufficiently proved.

As *Morality* supports all true *Religion*; so all true *Religion* aids and strengthens *Morality*. *Virtue*, in Conjunction with *Religion*, even *natural Religion*; is much more forcible than alone. Not only in respect of its *Sanctions*; which with Men indeed are apt to have the greatest Weight; but as the *internal Principle* is greatly enforced. The Streams of *Virtue* and *Religion*, by being united in the same Channel, become larger, and more vigorous: better able to surmount Difficulties, and bear down Temptations. When the *Reasonableness* of an Action cannot prevail; *Religion* comes seasonably in to the Agent's Relief: presents to his Mind his all-righteous Governor, and most bounteous Benefactor; and draws with all the Cords of Gratitude and Piety. When executing the Dictates of Reason and Truth appear less engaging, and desirable; he finds, in fulfilling his Maker's Will, new Charms, and fresh Attractions.—If *Virtue* cannot strike and subdue the Heart of Man in her own native Dress, her own amiable Colours; she willingly assumes a more awful Garb, and puts on the Robe of *Religion*. Thus arrayed both in Sweetness and Majesty; she conquers with more Ease, and captivates with greater Success. Not that true Religion ever

disguises Virtue. It neither changes her Complexion, nor alters a Feature. These are the odious Works of *Imposture* and *Superstition*. All that *Religion* means, is to place *Virtue* in a stronger Light, and give her a more solemn Appearance. Even its *Sanctions* are only *Guards*; intended for Security, and Dignity; and the gaining of those grosser Minds, who are less sensible of the intrinsic Excellence of Virtue and Religion.—In short; *Conformity to Truth*, and *Obedience to Divine Authority*, whether considered separately or jointly; are Principles so sacred and sublime; that a Capacity to be acted and governed by them, is the highest Honour which can possibly belong either to Men or Angels.

SEVERAL of the preceding Observations relating to Religion in general; must be applicable to that which is *Revealed*, as well as that which is *Natural*. But *Revealed Religion* having divers Peculiarities of its own; requires a distinct Consideration. It is not my Intention to go through such Particulars; which is far beyond, if not beside my present Purpose. For that it will be sufficient, to shew that those additional Laws which Revealed Religion has built on Natural, stand perfectly secure on the forementioned Ground. If the Christian Religion really contained any *Doctrines*, or *Duties*, inconsistent with *Truth* and *Rectitude*; then indeed it would follow, that there must be some Fault, either in the Foundation, or the Superstructure. But of this kind,

I have not yet met with any Thing fairly proved. No real Flaws, or Blemishes, have I been able to discover; whatever may have been fancied in it, or thrown upon it, by Ignorance, Prejudice, Disaffection, or Corruption. I deny not but the *Face of Christianity* may have been seen overspread, with thick *Dust* from one Quarter; vile *Paint* from another; and Heaps of *Dirt* from a third: but when these shall be thoroughly washed off; its native Beauty will soon return, and *appear without Spot, or Wrinkle, or any such Thing.*

THOSE Duties which *Revealed Religion* has superadded to *Natural*, may be considered as instrumental, subsidiary, and subordinate. Either they have a *visible Tendency* to promote moral, or natural Good; or an *invisible* one. For as to such Precepts as are totally *positive*, and strictly *indifferent*; I find no sufficient Grounds to conclude that any such have ever been enjoined. For as to the Tryal of Mens Obedience; I see not how it can ever require such Injunctions: since Men may be as effectually tryed without them. Their Obedience is as much shewn in submitting to a Command, the Reason of which is undiscoverable; as if the Command was absolutely indifferent. It seems therefore more agreeable to Divine Wisdom and Goodness, to prove the Obedience of his Creatures by such Commands, as have a real, tho' secret Tendency to the forementioned Good; than by such as have none at all. And on this Account I apprehend

hend that all positive Precepts have such Tendencies, either perceptible or imperceptible.

CONCERNING those Duties, the *Tendencies* whereof are, or may be, *perceived*; there seems not to be the least Room for Dispute. Whatever Part of *Revealed Religion* has a visible Connection with *Natural Religion*; must stand on the same Foundation. And such are the peculiar Precepts of *Christianity*; as hath been largely proved by the ablest Hands. Whatever promotes or facilitates the Practice of moral Duties; cannot be unfit for Men to learn; nor, by Consequence, unworthy of a Divine Revelation.—But might not Human Reason find out such Rules itself; and be able to discover *Religion of the Means*, as well as *Religion of the End*? It had not done it; and perhaps never would. The Management of distempered Minds, like that of distempered Bodies, requires more Skill, than the Direction of those that are sound. In a perfect State of Health, of either Kind; *Nature* may be a compleat Guide. But in Sicknes, and deep Diseases, Nature may be at a Loss; both in respect of Medicines, and a proper Regimen. In this Case, which in Fact was the Case; the *Souls* of Men want a *Physician* no less than their *Bodies*.—But supposing such Rules might and would have been found out by Human *Reason*; still they must be more valuable, and more effectual, if conveyed by *Revelation*. The Voice of a *Philosopher* would neither be heard so far, nor make such Impression; as that

that of a *Prophet*, or an *Apostle*. Men would naturally be more attentive to a Teacher, who could command *Winds*, *Seas*, and *Storms*; than to such as could command nothing but *Words*: and make a wide Difference between framing Arguments, and Periods; and *raising the Dead*. There is more Weight, more Authority, in a single Fact of this Kind; than in all the Volumes of the *Greek Sages* put together. I speak not of *convincing*, but *awakening* the Minds of Men; which is what the World chiefly wanted. And even as to *Conviction*; as Matters were thereby brought into a much narrower Compass; so they were made more level to all Capacities. Instead of long Trains of Reasoning, and intricate Deductions; thus the Evidence stood. He who can raise the Dead, must have God's Authority: and He who has God's Authority, can bring nothing but Truth; and even Truths of the highest Importance. And when to this are added, the Reasonableness, and * Perfection of Christ's Doctrine; who, in all respects, taught as never Man taught; what Satisfaction, what Conviction, could be afforded Mankind, either shorter or surer?

BUT to return; however manifest the Connection may be between *Revealed* and *Natural Religion*, in respect of the Rules and Precepts abovementioned; yet what shall we

* Nothing more is meant here by the Perfection of Christ's Doctrine, than its perfect Agreement with the unprejudiced Apprehensions of Mankind.

say to Those, which have *no visible Tendencies*, either natural or moral? I answer, that they are, and must be, equally secure; unless we make Human Reason the Measure and Standard of all Truth. To affirm that all Precepts are Incumbrances on Religion; whereof Men cannot discover the Grounds, and Connection with it; is not to be accounted for on any other Supposition. For if all the Reasons of things are confessedly not known, nor knowable by them; then possibly some of the unknown Reasons may be the Foundation of certain *positive Precepts*; which, for ought they know, may be very useful, and subservient to Religion.——But perhaps it may be urged; that supposing such Precepts thus grounded; yet how can they produce any Effect *morally* good, or conduce to the Improvement of the Agent; while he neither knows the Reason of them, nor sees their Connection with Morality? Can they operate as Charms? Or produce moral Effects imperceptibly?—I answer, that however the *Precepts* may operate, or not operate; yet Men's *Obedience* thereto, (supposing *them* divine, and *it* sincere) must have a good Effect; even sensibly, on the Mind of the Agents. Whatever be the Matter of the Command; every Act of pure Obedience manifestly conduces to the Furtherance of Piety and Godliness. And that not only in *them*, but in *others* too. Such Acts are not only of private, but public Use; not only self-beneficial, but exemplary.——On these Accounts,

counts, it may be very fitting, in certain Cases, for God to require, and Man to pay, an implicit Obedience. *Reason* itself commits Men into the Hands of *Religion*; for the Improvement of their Dispositions, and the Benefit of Discipline. They ought not only to submit their Minds, and conform their Actions, to the universal Law of Reason and Truth; but likewise, or rather as an Instance thereof, to pay a personal Homage to that great and glorious Being, whose Attribute Truth is. More particularly to entertain of Him the justest and most honourable Conceptions, that they can possibly frame; and to acknowledge Him most wise and righteous in all his Ways. In order hereto, the *positive* Part of Religion seems highly expedient; that his Authority may be revered, and submitted to; not only when the Reasons of his Commands are discernible, but when they are not; not only when they speak their own Worth, but when they are silent. In a Word; that the Divine Perfections may be confessed, and adored, even when *Clouds and Darkness are round about them*; as well as when they appear in a clear Light, or break out into an open Blaze of Wisdom and Truth.

— Nor is this more for the Honour of God, than it is for the Benefit of his Worshippers; as might be shewn at large.

BUT to illustrate and confirm the Point before us; I beg Leave to ask, whether it would be an Impeachment of any Man's Wisdom; if, to try the Obedience of his Children, he should

should give them an Order, the Reason of which none of them were able to discover ? I would ask again, supposing any of them disobeyed it, merely on that Account ; no good Reason occurring against it ; whether he would not look upon it as a just Cause of Displeasure ? It must be allowed, that the wisest Parent in the World would be dissatisfied at such Conduct in his Children, and resent it accordingly.

— But concerning the former Question, it may perhaps be urged, that the Instance is wide of the Case in Hand : forasmuch as an omniscient Creator can have no Occasion to try his Creatures, whatever Occasion Parents may have to try their Children. The Answer is as follows.

IF God's Intention, in the Tryal of his Creatures was merely to inform himself concerning the Behaviour of his Creatures ; then indeed such Experiments might be altogether needless. But the Ends and Reasons of his trying them, are, I humbly presume, quite of another Nature. Tho' He sees how his Creatures *will* act, from first to last ; and even how they *would* act on every Supposition ; yet till their Obedience be actually exercised, and proved ; neither can they reap the Benefit of it, nor He the Glory. The natural Advantages of Virtue and Religion are not to be obtained without an actual Exertion of Men's Wills and Endeavours ; as not resulting from what *may*, or *might* be done ; but what really *is* done. In like manner, the Reverence due to God and Goodness must be made manifest. Good Works must

must not only be *done*, but *seen*; that God may be glorified in the Prevalence of Truth and Righteousness. Neither of the Ends here mentioned can be effectually accomplished; unless Mens good Intentions and Dispositions be reduced to Practice.—And forasmuch as *positive Precepts* afford peculiar Opportunities of Trial, and exercise even the Moral Dispositions of the Mind in such a Way as could not otherwise be done; more particularly Gratitude, Piety, and Submission to God's Will; no other Cause need be assigned for the Institution of them. Their Connexion with Truth and Rectitude is fully manifest; and whoever attempts to separate them from Natural Religion, wounds, and weakens it.—There may indeed be Difficulty in accounting for a Multiplicity of such Precepts; and even a few may be perverted and abused. As to the latter of these Cases, it needs no clearing; and whenever the former is Fact, it must be owing to a Concurrence of extraordinary Circumstances: one of which must, I think, be, an unusual Grossness of Mind, and Hardness of Heart, in the People concerned; rendring them, in some measure incapable of purer Laws, and more moral Duties.—But whatever may be said of such Precepts, when very *numerous*; and of their Interference with Morality; no Argument can be drawn from hence against the Appointment of *any*. On the contrary, we have seen that the Reason of the Thing weighs the other Way; and

renders their Institution probable, without further Evidence. And if it appear they are enjoined; that they ought to be observed, is surely a Point that needs no Proof. Men can never acquit themselves even of their Obligations to *Truth*; if they do not act according to the *Relation* between *God* and *Them*: which certainly they can never do, if they disobey or neglect any of his known Commands, without a moral Dispensation. This Case excepted, every Divine Injunction must bind to Obedience; whether the Tendency of it appear, or not. And however inconsiderable the Action may be in itself; yet since it is wrought on a *Moral Ground*; from hence it must derive both Value and Beauty. In neither respect, it must be owned, comparable to the Performance of a *Moral Duty*; which, having the same *Ground*, is moreover essentially amiable and good in itself. *Moral Virtues* religiously practised, may be compared, in the Words of a Royal Author, to *Apples of Gold in Pictures of Silver*.

COULD it be proved, that *Reason* and *Truth* were not binding in their own Nature; but that all Obligation is to be referred to *Religion*, and resolved entirely into the Divine *Will*; then indeed the Competition (if it may be called such) between *Moral* and *Positive Duties* might easily and speedily be adjusted. It would be evident that the Pre-eminence could belong to neither; but that they were, and must be, precisely equal. If there

there be no Obligation, I say, but what arises from the *Will* of God ; and supposing all his Commands alike clear and express, and equally practicable ; it is manifest there could be no Ground of Preference among them. Both the Obligation and the Dignity of every Duty would be exactly the same.—But, on the other hand, if *Truth* be obligatory in itself, and God's *Will* only obliges in virtue of Truth ; then the Matter cannot possibly be thus compromised. *Moral* and *Positive Duties* will thus admit of no Comparison. For there must be very different Degrees of *Importance*, as well as *Evidence*. We certainly know that some Duties are both *morally* and *naturally* good in themselves ; both directly conducive to God's Glory ; and perfective of Human Nature : and from hence are *absolutely assured*, that they must not only be agreeable to the *Will* of God ; but likewise in full Proportion to their Moment : and in the same Proportion must they *intrinsically oblige*, on the same account. Other Duties are, at most, only *indirectly, instrumentally, or consequentially* good ; and at the same Time the Evidence of their being required not equal to the former. For, without immediate Revelation, no higher Proof than *Probability* is to be had concerning any *Positive Duties*. So that in neither respect can they rival *Moral* ones. In short ; if the *Obligations of Truth and Reason* be any Thing ; if they be but real, and not imaginary ; they must not only be su-

perior, but supreme, with all moral Agents.—If it be insisted, that all *religious Obedience* is founded on *Reason* and *moral Truth*; this has already been granted, and if I mistake not, proved. But what follows? Will any Man say, that because a *Pebble* may be *set in Gold* as well as a *Diamond*; therefore their Value is equal? *Positive Precepts*, however useful in Fact; yet might have been quite useless, and altogether *indifferent*: and yet even then they would have had a *moral Ground*. This is common to all real Duties: but no way affects or alters their *intrinsic Worth*.—Let us view this Matter in another Light. *Moral Duties*, when *religiously* performed, are *Acts of Obedience* as well as *positive Duties*. And it is not to be doubted but good Men frequently join God's *Authority* and the *Obligations of Truth* together; and act with regard to both. Thus compared, the Difference will be equally manifest. The Rectitude of God's *Will* is acknowledged either way. But in *moral Performances*, Homage is not only paid to the Rectitude of God's *Will*; but to the Sacredness and Perfection of his *Understanding*, from whence all eternal Truths necessarily flow. To which may be added; that if God wills Things in Proportion to real Worth, and intrinsic Goodness; then moral Duties must be proportionably more conformable to his Will, than any other. And on this account *Morality* may be looked upon not only as essential; but as the most *religious Part even of Religion* itself.

BEFORE

BEFORE I shut up these Papers, I beg Leave to answer an Objection or two, which may seem to lie against the principal Doctrine contained in them.

IT may be urged then in the first Place, that if so great Things be ascribed to *Reason* considered *objectively*, or as the *Rule of Truth*; the Consequence will be too much in Favour of our *Faculty*, which thereby seems immoderately magnified. It is on all hands confessed, that no Law can oblige any moral Agents further than it is *known*. If then *Truth* be of universal Obligation, it must be universally known; and all *Relations* be visible and plain to every Human Understanding.—

This is just as if a Man should argue, that because the Light of the Sun universally directs the Sight, and charms the Sense; therefore every human Eye must take it all in, and comprehend its Diffusion through the whole System. *Moral Obligation* has been here considered as *intellectual Attraction*, of the noblest Kind. But it is not, like *corporeal Attraction*, effected at a Distance. *Reason*, or the Appearance of Reason, must be perceived, before it can move the Mind at all—Between our *Faculty*, and *Truth* in general, there is an infinite Disproportion. Between our Faculty, and the whole System of *moral Truth*, a very great one. And even that Part of it which concerns ourselves, so far as to be requisite for bringing our Minds to that Pitch of Improvement and Perfection whereof they are capable;

capable ; even that, I say, seems to me a larger Portion than Man's Reason alone has been able to gather up.—However justly *the Sufficiency of Human Reason* may be maintained in Opposition to *monopolizing Christians* ; yet no Occasion, nor Grounds can I find, for stretching it to the Lengths and Demands of *Deism*. For my part, I am fully convinced, even in this Respect, of the Usefulness, tho' not the Necessity of Revelation ; and of the Advancement of *moral Science* thereby introduced. If Mens *Practice* be not improved by it in the same Proportion ; I need not say where the Blame lies.—But to return to the Objection ; *Human Reason* is neither magnified, nor diminished, by the Obligation and Perfection of *moral Truth*. For no Obligation, whether *moral*, or *sensible*, can possibly commence before Perception. This Doctrine therefore plainly leaves Mens Faculties just as it found them.

AGAIN ; if *Truth* only oblige *as such*, and when it is perceived ; what shall we say to *Errors* and *Misperceptions* ? How comes it to pass that *Erroneous Consciences* are as fast bound as those that are *best-informed* ?—I answer, that this Obligation belongs not to *Error*, but *Truth*. *Error* in itself can oblige nothing, and is nothing, but a meer imaginary Relation. And yet so sacred is *Truth*, that it binds and attaches Men to its very *Semblance*. Even a false Copy shall be regarded and rever'd, where the Original is not to be had.

In

In plain Words, that the *Will* be governed by the *Understanding*, whatever its Powers and Perceptions may be; is an eternal Dictate of Reason and Truth. *This Relation* is plain and clear in the midst of the greatest Obscurities; and to this the Mind conforms and submits even in the Pursuit of Error.

LASTLY, It may perhaps be objected, that the Doctrine here maintained seems to give an Advantage to *Unbelievers*; who are too much addicted to such Doctrines already, and prone to make an ill Use of them.—My Answer is, that I grudge no Part of Mankind the Benefit of Truth. If they pervert, or misapply it; let Them bear the Blame. As the Abuse of Revelation is no Argument against Revelation; so neither is the Abuse of Reason any Argument against Reason. But indeed in the Case before us, I can see no Advantage likely to accrue to them from any such Doctrine; unless it be that of their Conviction: which if ever it be affected by Reasoning; the Arguments, I am persuaded, must be drawn out of this Quiver. For while they imagine a Disagreement between Reason and Revelation; all Attempts in behalf of the latter must be in vain.—If we go along with the *Deists* as far as we can, in the Paths of *Morality* and *Natural Religion*; we need not doubt bringing them at last into the Road of *Revelation*. But if we divide at first setting out, and take quite different Ways; the Consequence will probably be, that we shall wander on without

ever meeting, and perhaps leave Truth behind us.—To depart from the established Principles, and fundamental Truths, because some believers adhere to them, and pervert them, seems to me a most unaccountable Conduct. If they disclaim the Authority of Revelation, must we therefore renounce the Obligations of Reason? If they rashly forsake the Gospel-Rule, and the Laws of Christianity; must we as rashly give up the Rule of Rectitude, and the Law of Truth? Hence, if I mistake not, chiefly proceed their Advantages and Triumphs. Whereas, were the Fortifications of Revealed Religion entirely erected on the forementioned Ground; it might easily and effectually be defended; or rather the Siege would soon be raised.—However; Christianity pure and undefiled can never be in any danger. *True Reason* must claim Kindred and common Parentage with it; and therefore run gladly into its Embraces. And *false Reason* cannot possibly prevail against it; but must sooner or later fly before it.—In fine; *Revelation* and *Rectitude*, however Men may confront them, or however disguise them; are, in themselves, at perfect Unity. Let them but appear in their native Colours; and such a Congruity, such an Affinity will be found between them; that whoever receives the One, will not long be able to reject the Other.